THE COMMAND TO LOOK

A FORMULA FOR PICTURE SUCCESS

WILLIAM MORTENSEN

To My Sister, Ellen
In Acknowledgement

Contents

Foreword

Twelve years ago, although technically competent, I tried in vain to obtain notice for my pictures, to get them into salons or into print.

Then I found out that any picture that "goes places" does so by following a definite psychological formula.

This little book relates the discovery of this formula, analyzes it in detail, and shows its concrete application in a series of prints that have won the approbation of publishers and salons. The book has nothing to do with technical problems, but is solely concerned with **the making of effective pictures.**

As I have found by experiments with my students, the formula is one of wide applicability. Anyone of fair technical competence should be able, by making use of this formula, to bring about substantial improvement in the effectiveness of his pictures.

ONE

Personal Questions

Did you ever think that you saw the possibilities of a fine picture in a bit of landscape or a street scene that happened to catch your eye? Did the accidental pose of a child ever strike you as having pictorial potentialities?

Did you ever eagerly point a camera in the direction of these interesting objects and take some pictures? Were you dissatisfied with the results? Did you ever wonder what was the vital element that you had missed? Did you ever consider why the thing that so stirred your imagination became crass and stupid when converted into a photograph?

Did you ever select some bit of your work that your friends had admired and send it along, with a little prayer and return postage, to the annual show of the Middletown Camera Club or to the Pittsburg Salon? Did you ever, after due time, receive it back with thanks and firm rejection?

Did you ever look through annuals, photographic magazines and salon catalogues and wonder to yourself, "What have these fellows got that I haven't got?"

Did you ever feel that you would gladly give ten years off your life if you could just see one of your pictures on the walls of the Pittsburg Salon or reproduced in **Life** or some photographic annual?

All these things I have done. Twenty years ago I was possibly the worst photographer on the North American continent. Some of my candid critics have implied that I still hold that distinction; but it is a fact that my pictures, for better or for worse, are more widely seen and exhibited than those of my critics.

Fifteen years ago I had acquired an adequate command of the technical details of photography. But my pictures got nowhere.

Then I discovered—But I am infringing on the material for the next chapter.

TWO

Personal History—
Origin of the Formula

Late in the year 1918, Company D of the 13th Regiment of the U. S. Army gratefully severed its connection with Private Mortensen, W.

I was mustered out at Camp Merritt, New Jersey. Presently I crossed the river to Manhattan and enrolled in the classes of the Art Students' League. Here I took the usual art courses under such men as George Bellows, Robert Henri and George Bridgman. After two years of this. I was commended for my industry but declared to have "no talent for drawing."

Undeterred by this verdict, I obtained financial backing and took passage for Greece, to make etchings of the monuments of ancient Attica. I took with me a heavy burden of copper plates and a great deal of youthful enthusiasm. My financial arrangements had, unfortunately, neglected to provide me with the means of eating; so, instead of drawing the Propylea by moonlight, I shortly found myself engaged in painting poster designs

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for a popular brand of cognac. The prevalent theme of these posters consisted of a series of Balkan ballerinas poised seductively tip-toe on the corks of bottles. Before long the demand for these was exhausted, and I returned to New York on money loaned me by the American Consul. One of the last things I remember seeing in Greece was a fat Greek sailor looking with evident approbation at one of my cognac cuties displayed on the walls of a honky-tonk in Piraeus.

Back in America, an artist and a man of the world, I "accepted a position" (as the saying goes), teaching art in the Eastside High School of my home town, Salt Lake City. Here I busied myself bringing the message of the Old Masters to sixty seductive young Mormons. During this time, becoming increasingly conscious of my limitations as a draughtsman, I began experiments with photography. My camera at this time was a 5x7 view. My first models were girls from my classes, who posed for me after school hours —to the great distress of the janitor. On Saturdays I packed my camera, my model, and a yard of crepe de chine into the sidecar of my motorcycle and sought **al fresco** settings in the adjoining countryside. I regret to report that the Dean of Women followed us on one such occasion. At the end of the year it was mutually agreed between the Board of Education and myself that it would be best for all concerned that I submit my resignation.

From out of the West had come rumors of big doings in Hollywood. So I packed my motorcycle side-car with

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my camera, with hundreds of costume plates, and with a large collection of masks that I had been making. I also hopefully included my yard of crepe de chine—just in case. With these—and forty dollars—I headed West.

Hollywood was at that time passing through its most super-colossal phase. It had outgrown the tumbling and awkwardness of its first days, and had not yet run into the doldrums of the early talkie period. It was beginning to be conscious of its power. It was huge and vulgarly magnificent, grandiose and spectacularly colorful. Size was its god and de Mille its prophet. This was the time of the exploitation of the "cutie." Certainly never before in history had so many and such varied examples of feminine pulchritude been gathered together in a single place.

Into this seething Babylon, masquerading as a suburb of Los Angeles, I plunged with my view camera, my forty dollars, and my yard of crepe de chine.

How I survived those first months remains at this date something of a mystery to me. Presently I found myself working for Ferdinand Pinney Earle, designing sets and costumes for his spectacular production of **The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayamm**. This picture made much use of trick camera work—of which I took due note. I owe a great deal to the influence of this man, with his combined gifts of showmanship and outlandish imagination.

Through the influence of Theodore Kosloff of the Russian Ballet I got a job with Cecil B. de Mille and became a neophyte fairly near the throne in this Hollywood hierarchy. During the following six years I was employed on nearly every de Mille production, designing sets and costumes and making hundreds of masks.

Meanwhile, I carried on my photographic experiments and after a while set up shop as a portrait photographer on Hollywood Boulevard. During this time I had models aplenty (from the dancing classes of Theodore Kosloff, Marion Morgan and Ruth St. Denis), took thousands of nudes. Of these thousands, a mere half-dozen survive. In a self-critical frenzy some time later I destroyed the lot.

I also developed a strange facility for attracting and gathering about me all sorts of odd characters and freaks. My studio swarmed with midgets, acromegalic giants, fat ladies, pinheads, dog-faced boys, bearded women, and all the weird residue of defunct circuses. These strange folk fascinated me with their pictorial possibilities.

In 1924 the entire eleventh floor of the Western Costume Company was turned over to me as a studio and workshop. This concern was at that time virtually the storehouse and treasure chest of the entire picture industry. Here I had access to at least ten thousand costumes and an infinite store of properties in the way of jewelry, armor, swords, and similar expensive and rare items of decoration. As models, I had available almost any of the screen personages who happened to drop in for a costume fitting—which included a large proportion

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of the "big names" of that day. Here are just a few of those who sat for me during this period: Rudolph Valentino, Alla Nazimova, Norma Shearer, Ramon Navarro, Betty Compson, Norma Talmadge, Lon Chaney, Warner Baxter, Clara Bow, Ann Pennington.

Here, surely, was an ideal set-up for a photographer—something to dream about, in fact—a tremendous wealth of material, and virtually **carte blanche** for any experiments I wished to carry on.

But, despite all this, I DID NOT, DURING THIS TIME, GET ONE **PICTURE** WORTHY OF THE NAME.

The realization of this sorry fact came to me rather slowly.

For a long time I was distracted and amused, as all photographic beginners are apt to be, by the clever machinery of the camera, and by the ever-amazing dark-room miracle of development and printing. When these things became mere matters of useful routine, I still found ample scope for entertainment in dealing with all the colorful and exciting physical stuff in front of the camera—in juggling with sets and costumes, and in working with legions of beautiful and talented models. It was some time before I had an uneasy suspicion, which presently grew into a conviction, that, in all this wealth of material, there was one all-important thing lacking. This was results—PICTURES.

This term "picture" would be variously defined by different people. I may shortly take a crack at defining it myself. But no matter how we define the term, there is

one fundamental thing that a picture-maker always expects of his picture—that it will be **looked at.** He who makes a picture always assumes a public that looks at pictures.

This is the situation with practically all picture-makers, I am sure. There **may** be some photographers who are making their pictures "for all time," but I haven't met them. Most of us would a thousand times prefer the attention of this generation to the approbation of posterity.

On the basis of this crude and primitive definition, it was clear that my photographs were not pictures, for they were not being looked at. And, as a picture-maker, I had to have attention. I became sensitive and positively neurotic about this failure of my efforts to get over with the looking public. I hid myself inside my studio and anxiously scanned the faces of passers-by for reactions as they glanced toward the exhibit in my window. Unhappily, there were no detectable reactions.

One very definite sign of the effectiveness of a picture is that it is able to make the grade in salons and publications. I began to try to crash the salons and the magazines. With total unanimity, my prints were returned—with thanks. Still in the dark as to what the matter was, and growing a little panicky, I sent out more and more prints, squandering a young fortune in postage, and bombarding all exhibitions and salons large or small, from Los Angeles to London, from Sitka to Cape Town.

Then suddenly, without warning, the thing happened

I had a picture accepted for the London Salon. Shortly afterward it was reproduced in **American Photography, the American Annual** and numerous local journals and salon catalogues. In the year that followed this startling event, the picture made a tour of most of the principal salons of the world and came home finally because there was no more room on the back for stickers.*

When I had recovered from the shock, I did that which I should have done long before: I gave thought to the matter. Why should "Salome" go over when all the others failed so ignominiously? Obviously there was no mere fluke involved. A fluke might explain an acceptance in the exhibit of the Podunk Camera Club, but so august a body as the jury of the London Salon would scarcely accept a print without some sort of reason.

So I subjected "Salome" to a searching analysis. What did this print have that my others had failed to include? After long study I began to get a glimmering of definite differences in treatment and presentation that marked "Salome" off from the rest. From the study of my own accidental success I proceeded to an analysis of the works of other photographers who had attained salon recognition. Finally I arrived at the point I should have started from—the study of the works of the master painters. Certainly pictures that have survived the criticism of the

*This picture was called **Salome,** and it was shown in the London Salon, reproduced in **American Photography,** and included in the **American Annual** for 1928. Those inclined to research among melancholy relics of the outlived past may wish to look it up. It was definitely a bad picture, despite the recognition given it; but it contained effective picture elements and was thus able to give me guidance toward future acceptances and toward the clarification of the formula that is embodied in this book.

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centuries must have elements of both effectiveness and universality. Both in the works of the photographers and of the painters I found confirmation for the things that I had marked in "Salome", and I began tentatively to shape up a formula that embodied these pictorial factors.

Now, there is something about the word "formula" that for some people seems to contradict the very essence of art. Art is unconfined—art is free—they aver, and must not be bound down by a formula. As a matter of fact, as Carl van Vechten has pointed out, every artist has a formula. Shakespeare had a formula, Michaelangelo had a formula, Wagner had a formula. And, today, Misonne has a formula, Steichen has a formula, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin each has a formula. By the formula the artist's material is put into a shape more readily assimilable by the looker or listener.

So I sought for a formula that would provide a means of securing **pictorial effectiveness.**

Armed with my new formula, I critically inspected my old pictures—and destroyed most of them forthwith. The formula made their pictorial shortcomings immediately apparent.

I began working along the new lines indicated by the formula. I had quite extraordinary success in getting recognition from the salons. They weren't all first-rate pictures—far from it—but I was able to provide for **effective presentation** of the second and third raters. A large proportion of the pictures which form the second half of this book have been seen in salons.

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At the same time, I began trying the magazines with specimens of the new crop of pictures, and was successful in obtaining contracts for pictorial series from **Theater Magazine** and **Vanity Fair.**

De Mille began work on **King of Kings,** and I got the job as still photographer on the production. It was about eight months in making, and I shot some four hundred dozen 3¼x4¼ negatives during this period. Mr. de Mille wished the stills to be pictorial studies instead of the usual type of record shot and lobby display. A selection of sixty of the best of these were bound into a fine volume, one copy of which at present reposes in the Vatican Library (where it is, I believe, the only photographic book to be so honored).

About this time, vague rumblings and distant squawkings were heard just over the Hollywood hills. These were the first faint rumors of the advent of the talkies. The good old days of unashamed magnificence were about done, and a new mechanistic era approached.

The depression, the talkies, growing dissatisfaction and possibly a tardy arrival at maturity, all contributed to terminate my stay in Hollywood. So I renounced the world, the flesh and the Devil, tore up my yard of crepe de chine, and sought a stern sequestered life in a small village on the shores of the Pacific.

My experiences have not all of them been ennobling. But most of them have been enlightening. And out of them I have been able to derive the formula. It is defin-

itely **my own** formula, which grew out of my own need to clarify what makes, not only a good picture, but an **effective** one. However, I think that it is of sufficiently universal import to be of general usefulness.

I give the formula now, although you will require the chapters following to fully understand its significance and application.

(1) **The picture must, by its mere arrangement, make you look at it.**
(2) **Having looked—see!**
(3) **Having seen—enjoy.**

The meaning and use of the formula will be developed in the chapters that follow.

THREE

The Pictorial Imperative

The reason for relating "the melancholy tale of Me" in such prolix detail is solely to give the background for the formula and the varied ingredients of experience that went into its making. For this is no arbitrarily concocted formula spun from mere speculation. It is a tried and tested rule of working boiled down from years of experiment and practical experience.

I realized, after I had found and clarified the formula, that I had had it within my hand's grasp for a long time without knowing it. For it is a formula inherent in the nature and experience of all who work in the arts.

Why does an artist paint pictures, write symphonies, carve statues, tell stories? Is it because he finds joy and spiritual release in the mere doing of these things? Probably; but this is not the whole story. Is it because he makes his living after this fashion? No doubt; but there is still more to it than this.

Here is the third reason. It is a very significant reason, though it is generally disregarded. The artist persists in being an artist because he revels in the feeling that he may affect or influence people by his work. He does not demand approbation, but he does demand **notice and response.** The thought that he may through his work influence people and strike past their defenses to their secret emotions gives him a gratifying sense of power.

The Romantics conceived of the artist living in an ivory tower apart from men and affairs. It is barely possible that an artist could live and create in such sanpense for his labors, he must descend to the plane of the market place and note and rejoice in the effect of his works on other men. Nor is it enough for him to have his friends dutifully say "Ah!" He wants to have evidence of the effect of his works on the large, personally indifferent public. It is a matter of lesser importance to him whether the public is pleased, amused or angered at his works; but **some** sort of reaction he must have, and on this his ego nourishes itself.

So it is with me. The high point and the great reward in my Greek adventure, as I realized later, was the libidinous gleam I detected in the eye of the Greek sailor who looked at the dancer in my cognac poster. And it was probably true that there was more of the real stuff in one of my cognac cuties than in all my mild and academic etchings. In the Salt Lake episode, the big kick in making photographs of my young models did not come primarily from any aesthetic joy of creation.

but from observing the reaction of my models and others to the pictures I had secured.

The truth is that there is a great deal of the showman in every artist who is worth his salt. As such, he posts lurid signs, he beats on a gong, he yells himself hoarse —anything to halt the passing crowd and lure them inside his tent. Of course, if he is a wise showman as well as an energetic one, he will have something worthwhile to offer the crowd when he has gotten them inside —but that is another story and a later chapter.

So, being by instinct a showman, although I had not yet recognized the fact, I naturally gravitated toward Hollywood—the town in which reputations rose, prospered or fell on the basis of showmanship. Here I improved my education in the elements of showmanship, though I did not yet realize their close connection with picture-making. Especially valuable, as I discovered later, were the tips I picked up while working for that master-showman, Cecil B. de Mille.

So when I began to clarify my formula for picture success, I found that it expressed itself in terms of showmanship. In speculations about art there has been too much said about rules of composition and the motives and emotions of the artist. What counts finally and significantly is the reaction of the ultimate consumer—of the guy that looks at the picture. So we need to talk about the **laws of looking** and the **emotions of the looker.**

Whether you get anywhere with your picture-making depends ultimately on whether you can get anybody to

look at your pictures. There are some pictures that no more require your active attention than does the pattern on the wall paper; and there are others that demand to be looked at, that wrench your attention to them. Pictures must speak definitely and decisively in order to be heard, and when attention is obtained, they must have something to say.

Good showmanship is the basis of the first item in the formula. Let me quote it again:

(1) The picture must ... make you look at it.

"Must **make** you look at it." To all who come within its influence it says brusquely, "Look at me!" It must com**mand** you to look at it. It is this quality of an effective picture that I have designated as "the pictorial imperative."

Try this experiment. Take any photographic annual, or any similar sizable collection of pictures, and thumb through it quickly. You will notice that there are some pictures that, even at this rapid glance, arrest and grip your attention. Others are just a series of scattered gray splotches. It is these immediately effective pictures that, if they can live up to their promise, are destined to have the widest recognition. These are the pictures that contain the elements of "the pictorial imperative." You will probably notice one other curious thing as you thumb through the pictures. Some of the effective pictures seem to take effect by a sort of delayed action. You will pass such a one by along with the rest, and then, four or five pictures later, it will suddenly bring you

up short. "Holy smoke! what was that?" And you will turn back to it. It is characteristic of effectively presented pictures that they often cause the beholder to do this sort of a "double take" (as the directors call it).

No picture that does not have this Imperative quality can be a first-rate picture, nor can it hope for any degree of pictorial success—no matter how excellent the technique involved or how interesting or pleasing the subject-matter. Before a picture can win appreciation for itself on the basis of these latter points, it must—

RING A BELL,
SOUND A SIGNAL, OR
SPEAK A COMMAND

Sometimes a picture sounds its signal in so distinctive a manner that it persists through a welter of conflicting and habitual impressions. Hence, the phenomenon of the "double take", which I mentioned above.

The attention of the looker may be likened to a poised stone on a hillside. It is a mass with considerable initial resistance or inertia. Feeble and tentative efforts fail to budge it. It takes a good hard heave to start it rolling—and then it will keep going of its own accord. The Imperative is the force that overcomes the initial inertia of the looker.

Since the Imperative often has the effect of a **force** applied against the inertia or indifference of the looker, I shall frequently refer to it hereafter as the IMPACT. It is, indeed, a **blow** that starts things rolling.

What is the origin of the IMPERATIVE? What is the

nature of the IMPACT? What are the things that make a picture **ring a bell, sound a signal,** or **speak a command?**

These questions we will consider in the next chapter.

FOUR

Analysis of the Impact

Why do you look at some pictures and pass others over? Why do some pictures bring you up with a start and others attract no more attention than the familiar furniture that surrounds you in your home?

Some pictures, we have seen, speak in terms of the Pictorial Imperative. They demand to be looked at. If we decline to look at them we are left uneasy until we turn back and acknowledge the demand.

What is the nature of this quality in a picture that exercises so imperious a command over our attention? Does it have anything to do with subject matter? Or anything to do with pleasing aesthetic quality? The answer is in both cases, No. A picture exercises its demand on our attention **before** we know what it is about, and **before** we know whether it pleases us. **The first impression of a picture is a merely visual one—** a blob of black and white devoid of rational meaning or aesthetic import.

Some of these blobs of black and white we pass over and relegate to the background of our consciousness.

Others startle us into awareness. What is the difference between one and another, that one, by sheer effect of its pattern, is able to compel our attention?

The answer is that a certain few patterns strike at deep-lying instinctive responses within ourselves. The Impact, the first blow of the picture against our consciousness, is purely **biological** in its effect.

To what sort of sense stimuli do animals and primitive men give their quickest and completest attention? It is to those stimuli that suggest DANGER. The first business of the race is to preserve itself; so the FEAR RESPONSE is the one that is most easily aroused. A strange, small, unidentified sound, some shape that moves menacingly in the dusk —and the nape of the neck bristles and every faculty is concentrated on the potential source of harm. No matter how far we have evolved from the savage and the beast, we are still, first of all, responsive to **fear-arousing stimuli.** When we are alone at night in strange surroundings (and thus thrown upon our own resources) we are still very accessible to the primitive fears. Let but a shadow fall on the window or a mouse skitter in the partition, and stark terror traces a cold finger down our spine. We stop breathing; we strain eyes, ears, all our senses, to give the utmost attention to the thing that frightens us.

Herein we have the answer to the question why certain patterns of black and white have such strange power to grip our attention. Here is why: In looking

at pictures, WE GIVE OUR ATTENTION FIRST TO THOSE SENSE IMPRESSIONS THAT REPRESENT THINGS THAT WE ONCE, FAR BACK IN RACIAL HISTORY, FEARED.

Therefore, the picture that claims our attention most immediately and completely is the one that, in its first visual impression, relates itself to some ancestral fear.

To put it more simply, you look most quickly and instinctively at those pictures that suggest, in their mere black and white pattern, something that was **feared** by your ancestor that lived in a cave.

Forestalling a Protest

I anticipate that at about this point — particularly if you haven't read the foregoing paragraphs very carefully — you will start raising questions. "Look at pictures because I am afraid of them?" you will say. "What a preposterous idea. Does Mortensen mean to tell me that I look at a picture of a child because I am afraid of a child? Stuff and nonsense!"

To which I would reply: "Take it easy! You will find that matters will be made much clearer a couple of pages later. So, read on — and hold your protests until you get a clearer idea of what I am talking about."

But, before you continue, be sure you understand this point: We are not now saying anything about the subject-matter of the picture or what the picture represents. We are at this time concerned only with the **pattern of the picture,** the conformation of black and

white blobs—the first thing that catches our attention, before we recognize anything in the picture.

The Four Picture Patterns

Primitive man is surrounded by things that he fears. Yet the actual sources of these fears are few. Similarly, the visual patterns that stand for basic fears are likewise few in number.

There are **four** types of visual stimulus that directly call forth the fear response. These are:

1. Something that moves swiftly across our field of vision. We may not know **what** it is, but we know that it **moves**—and with swiftness and determination.

2. Something that approaches in a slithering, furtive fashion.

3. The threat of **sharpness,** whether of tooth or blade.

4. A massive stationary object that blocks our path. It may be man or beast or just an inanimate object, but it is compact and formidable and indomitably awaits our coming.

These four basic fears express themselves in **four basic picture** patterns:

1. The symbol of swift and menacing movement is the DIAGONAL. It also represents the primitive source of terror, the lightning flash. (Figure 1.)

2. Secret and furtive movement is represented by the snake-like S-CURVE. Here we have the

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

prototype of such fears as the serpent, the tiger that slithers through the grass, the hidden enemy that twists and turns. This is the real basis of the fascination of the so-called "Line of Beauty", which was described by Hogarth. (Figure 2.)

3. The threat of sharpness is conveyed in combinations of TRIANGLES. (Figure 3.)

4. The obstacle to our movement is expressed in a picture as a compact DOMINANT MASS. (Figure 4.)

Of these four **basic picture patterns,** the DOMINANT MASS is the one most frequently encountered. What causes a mass to dominate? There are several factors that contribute in giving dominance to the principal mass in a picture.

a. Unity. If several individuals are present, they gain strength by being linked together.

b. Cohesion. A mass is more dominating if it is compact, and devoid of projecting excrescences. Thus, the quality of coherence is expressed by a closed fist; the lack of it by an open hand.

c. Isolation. A mass gains strength if it is separated from confusing or extraneous elements of its surroundings or background.

d. Contrast. An important method of separating and differentiating a mass from its surroundings is contrast. Therefore a light mass is set against a dark background, and a dark mass against a light background.

e. **Size.** Other factors being equal, a mass becomes more threatening and dominating the larger it is.

f. **Stability.** A mass is more formidable if it seems firmly planted and immovable. Hence the effectiveness and predominance of the pyramid form.

The impact, then, falls into one of these **four basic picture patterns:**

1. THE DIAGONAL.
2. THE S-CURVE.
3. THE TRIANGLE COMBINATION.
4. THE DOMINANT MASS.

These four patterns, because of their relationship to ancestral fears, are the most effective means of winning instant attention to a picture.

Note that these four patterns are not mutually exclusive. They may be variously combined. Thus, a dominant mass of pyramidal form naturally embodies triangles. And triangles, in their turn, involve the use of the diagonal.

Impact and Climax

The reflex, biologically-conditioned first response to the picture we have designated as the Impact. Although the Impact is the first part of the picture that hits you, its effect is not limited to this momentary shock. When the picture is studied and known better, the quality of the Impact still pervades and dominates

the whole. And often it is the part of the picture that stays with you longest.

In the narrative arts, and in music, the element of Climax is something that is built up to gradually. Frequently the culmination is arrived at through a series of minor climaxes. But in pictorial art the reverse procedure is followed: **the Climax must arrive first.** In one instant of time the big moment of the picture must be **there.** In musical terms a picture may be expressed as follows: a big crushing **fortissimo** chord by the whole orchestra, followed by quieter and ever more contemplative music which dies away into musing silence.

Thus the Impact is both the beginning and its culmination.

After the Impact

After the sheer biological shock has diminished, the looker comes to the quieter processes of recognition and appreciation. This brings us to the second phase of the formula—and to our next chapter.

FIVE

Subject Interest

Let us take another look at the formula that I stated at the end of Chapter Two:

(1) **The picture must, by its mere pattern, make you look at it.**
(2) **Having looked—see!**
(3) **Having seen—enjoy!**

In the last chapter we saw that the first effectiveness of a picture—the command to look—is due to its black and white pattern. The ability of some patterns to stop you and make you look at them is due to their close relationship to primitive fear responses. We found, finally, that there are four basic picture patterns that have, in a particularly large degree, the ability to command your attention.

The Second Phase

We come now to the second phase of the formula:

(2) **Having looked—see!**

Having gotten the attention of your public by means

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of the mere pattern of your picture—the visual impact —as we call it—you must now have **something to show them.** Your ballyhoo has gotten the audience inside your tent, you must now **bring on the entertainment.** You have gotten their attention; you must now **hold their interest.** Without solid interest to back up the picture's original command to look, the attention dwindles almost instantly, and the audience goes away annoyed, feeling that they have been cheated and that the picture is a fraud—as, indeed, it is.

The first phase of the formula dealt with means of getting attention. **The second phase of the formula deals with means of holding interest.**

The Subject

The thing that holds our interest in a picture is primarily, of course, the subject—the thing that the picture is about. Specialists may be interested in how the picture was made, but the abiding and universal interest in any picture is simply the subject matter.

So in this chapter we will concern ourselves with different phases of **subject matter,** its requirements, varieties, and the methods of presenting it.

Recognition

The basic, minimum requirement of pictorial subject matter is that it be readily recognizable. We want to be able to see, without delay, "what it is a picture **of.**"

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This is not solely for the sake of clearness. There is a positive pictorial pleasure that comes from the mere **recognition** of the subject matter.

The **Impact** of a picture, the initial "crash" of its pattern, commands our attention, we have seen, because of its association with a few basic **fears.** So, after the shock of the Impact has startled us into looking, there is a pleasure akin to relief in discovering that the thing that startled us is in reality something familiar and harmless. It is not — for example — a lion in the path, but something pleasantly feminine, that constitutes the DOMINANT MASS that so arrested our attention. The DIAGONAL that commands us to look at it (because of its relationship to primitive fears) is not a menacing movement, but merely the comfortably sloping roof of a cottage. And so on.

This factor of recognition is a very important one. If the Impact that gets the observer's attention is not immediately followed by recognition of the subject matter, he is certain to be resentful. This is the effect of the "puzzle pictures" so much favored by some photographers—pictures that, by camera angles, outré lighting or weird magnification, convert commonplaces into monstrosities. These pictures, instead of affording a pleasant reaction of recognition after the shock of the Impact, bring one to a bewildered standstill. Only after brain-racking thought and analysis does one realize that the outlandish contour represents—let us say—a frog's-eye view of a familiar bathroom fixture. The locker

quickly tires of such guessing games and very soon declines to be bothered by them. At this stage he gratefully seeks out those pictures that reveal themselves simply and directly for what they **are**—pictures in which recognition follows immediately upon the Impact.

Types of Subject Matter

This matter of recognition is essential. But recognition is not enough **of itself** to hold the interest of the observer. "Yes, yes," he will say impatiently, "I see that it is a picture of an egg beater.—What of it?"

The observer must not be given the chance to ask this disconcerting question. The question is avoided if he is shown subject material that immediately calls forth emotional response. The types of subject matter that are surest in their ability to hold interest are those that are most broad and general in their emotional appeal. The egg beater is a source of emotional concern to very few people—possibly only to eggs. So the locker rudely and justifiably says of the picture of the egg beater: "What of it?" But such subjects as a human head alive with personality, a landscape full of mood, or a significantly distorted character portrait, these are general in their emotional appeal and are a perennial source of picture interest.

Sources of Emotional Appeal

Since successful pictorial material must be so broad

and general in its appeal, it follows, of course, that it must relate itself to a **very few** basic human emotions. Only in the field affected by these few emotions are human likes and dislikes fairly uniform and predictable.

Cecil B. de Mille used to say that there were just four elements needed in a motion picture to ensure its success with the public. As he was a notable producer of box-office successes, his formula must strike near to the truth. The essential elements according to de Mille were: sex, sentiment, religion and sport. Being a clever and resourceful showman, he generally seasoned his opuses liberally with all four elements.

When I was endeavoring to clarify my formula for picture making, I evolved my own list of three themes that I had found to be sure-fire in their subject appeal. Before I mention and describe these basic themes, one warning must be given. All summaries such as these should be regarded merely as suggestive simplifications, **not as hard-and-fast rules.** Human emotions resist rigid classification, and gaily leap the fences of the categories into which you try to shove them. However, the list that follows will be found to express the source of subject interest of at least ninety per cent of the pictures in this book.

Here, according to my analysis, are the three principal sources of subject interest in pictures:

SEX.
SENTIMENT.
WONDER.

These three we may rate unquestionably as the "big three" among picture themes. It is not difficult to suggest additional categories; but I have found these to be the most practically useful and to include nearly all effective pictorial subject material.[*]

The Sex Theme

Of the three, sex is undoubtedly the most primitive and direct in its appeal. It covers a wide scope, running into outright pornography on one hand, and shading imperceptibly into sentiment on the other.

The nude, of course, is the subject material that is commonly associated with the theme of sex. The fact of nudity is secondary, however. A picture may be sexual in its import without including the nude. On the other hand, sex is not **always** the primary interest when the nude is used. (See, for example, "The Priestess," in the pictures that follow, in which the primary interest is Wonder.)

It is interesting to note that women are just as much attracted to the theme of sex when presented in the form of the feminine nude as men are. The attraction in this case is vicarious, rather than direct. Their pleasure comes from **imagining** themselves placed in a situation where they would receive the same admiration that goes out to the theme of the picture. There-

[*] I have excluded the element of "sport," popular though it is, because it introduces factors of contention, conflict and action that belong more properly to drama and narrative than to pictorial forms.

fore, the attraction of the sex theme (excepting only its directly pornographic use) is in no way limited by the gender of the looker.

It is probably no longer necessary, as it was in pre-War days, to explain and justify the use of the sex motive in pictorial art. Psychologists have recognized sex as a great energizing influence in life. As such, it is bound to play a large part, directly or indirectly, in all forms of art.

Typical and varied instances of the use of the sex theme are seen in "Frou Frou", "Torse", and "Portrait of a Young Girl". Of these, "Frou Frou" is the most direct in its appeal. "Torse" takes a middle ground, and "Portrait of a Young Girl" shows sex softening into sentiment.

The Sentiment Theme

Despite the modern tendency to sneer at sentiment, it is still a very potent influence in life and an ever-appealing theme in art.

Lowell defines sentiment as "emotion precipitated in pretty crystals". It is concerned with the softer, tenderer things of life. Sentiment is often the meeting ground of humble material and lofty emotions. In a sentimental mood we see familiar things touched with grandeur, and remote things made intensely interesting and personal.

Those equivocal moments when laughter and tears seem to be in even balance are sentimental. Sentimental also is the characteristic Romantic tendency to

read emotion and mood into the changing lights, shadows and shapes of inanimate Nature.

The phases and mutations of sentiment are innumerable, but it is always readily recognized and appreciated. A few characteristic manifestations of the theme are the following:

The softer aspects of sex.
Children.
Hardships of Humble Life.
Domestic Life.
Animals.
Landscape.
Appeals to national pride.
The glamour of the past.

Characteristic variations of the theme of sentiment will be found in the following pictures: "Piety", "A la Gare", and "My Aunt".

The Wonder Theme

This theme is also broad in its scope. Part of its field is that mentioned by de Mille as "religion".

That which is unknown, uncertain or mysterious in its working is always a subject of interest. And despite the swagger of our modern learning, there is still much that remains very mysterious to us today. Night and its shadows surround us during half the period of our life on earth, and at least half the things about us remain strange and mysterious in their working. We

all of us are conscious of forces that move behind the shadows. The "Powers of Darkness" are still with us.

The fascination of the wonder theme is universal, though some persons are reluctant to concede it lest they betray how flimsy this fiction called civilization and learning really is. If nothing more, it provides us all with a welcome escape from the world of hard, bright fact into a land of shadow and surmise where one may live for awhile with the creatures of the twilight.

The wonder theme appears in many mutations. It is ingenuous and childlike in the form of fairy stories. It takes a humorous turn in grotesque art. It may turn morbid in an interest in the mal-forms of life: the perennial interest in side-show attractions such as the fat lady and the man who writes with his toes is another manifestation of the wonder theme. It may draw near the fringes of fear in the supernatural and witchcraft and demonology. And the final manifestation of the wonder theme is that silent Mystery of Mysteries, Death, before which we all pause appalled and fascinated.

It has been a theme of particular interest to me. Many examples will be found among the subsequent pictures. A few instances are: "Death of Hypatia", "The Vampire", and "Belphegor".

Incomplete Pictures

I must at this point reiterate one point more em-

phatically and explicitly. Impact and subject interest are **both** vital parts of a successful picture, and **both must be present.** A picture in which one of these elements is lacking is only part of a picture.

Both types of incomplete picture are, unhappily, quite common. One cries out to be looked at, and then has nothing to show you. The other has something to show you, but never gets looked at. The picture that has Impact but no Subject Interest is very annoying. The one that has Subject Interest but no Impact is merely innocuous—and a sad waste of good material.

You may avoid these unhappy, half-way pictures in your work by making sure that your pictures provide both Impact and Subject Interest—that is, by fulfilling the first two phases of the Formula.

"Wolf! Wolf!"

In view of this interdependence of Impact and Subject, I am now better able to clear up an objection that may have occurred to some of you in perusing the last chapter.

"First shock art" is a term that critics have applied to certain aspects of Modernism. This is art that gets you to look at it by sheer assault on the senses. It startles you—and then has nothing more to say. It screams "Wolf! Wolf!"—and then fails to produce the animal.

This superficial sensationalism is undoubtedly—and

unfortunately—a frequent symptom of modern art. Let it not be thought that, by my emphasis on the importance of the Impact, I am here advocating any mere "first shock art". I do insist that the "first shock" (or Impact) **is** important and essential as a means of overcoming the initial inertia of the looker. But the first shock—as we have seen—is not all there is to a picture. And, furthermore, the Impact must be in **pictorial** terms and of a form **compatible with the subject matter**. So, for example, we would not seek to make Mona Lisa more effective by putting green flash bulbs in her eyes, or by outlining her frame with Neon lights. The first shock of such procedure would undoubtedly be terrific; but the Impact would bear no conceivable relationship to Mona Lisa.

Presentation of Subject Matter

Despite the use of an Impact and the choice of broadly appealing Subject Matter, your photography may still be lacking in truly pictorial qualities. Your picture is arresting (owing to the Impact), and momentarily interesting (owing to the choice of a theme of wide emotional appeal); yet it is not a picture that you return to many times. This lack grows out of certain faults in the **presentation of the subject material**.

This is a fault particularly involved in the straight realistic presentation peculiar to the snap-shot and the candid camera. It is also characteristic of press photography. The mention of the press gives the clue for the reason for the fugitive interest of the snap-shot and the fruits of the candid camera. News pictures and news stories all carry a **date line** saying this is what happened at a certain time in a certain place. Despite the violent interest created by up-to-the-minute news (Love Nest, Royal Romance, and Nude Corpse in the West End), a newspaper of two months ago seems as quaint and outmoded as something from another century.

In a similar manner, candid camera products, snapshots and such pictures **all carry a date line**—not a printed one, to be sure; but a perfectly obvious date line inherent in the very nature of the picture itself. As a result, they are branded as having been made at a certain time and a certain place, and fade from memory as rapidly as yesterday's newspaper.

Therefore, though the great themes like Sex, Sentiment and Wonder may always be depended upon to arouse intense interest in a picture, in order to make this interest permanent and enduring, **the date line must be eliminated**.

For instance, an assiduous candid camera fan might, on successive week-ends, get such shots as the following: (1) front row impressions of a strip-tease artist practicing her trade; (2) children playing in the street; (3) close-ups of a voodoo ceremony in Haiti. He has here included the themes of Sex, Sentiment and Wonder, respectively, and for this reason his pictures would

be certain to arouse interest. But—unless, by some happy accident, the date line has been left off—they would scarcely have longer life than the news picture of today's beauty contest winner.

Eliminating the Date Line

The thing that makes a picture permanently interesting to you is not the realistic, accurate record it gives you of the accidents of wrinkles and wens of a certain person, and the accidents of light and shade on a certain June day, and the accidents of background of a certain town in Ohio. That which continues to hold your interest in any given subject matter is the kernel of permanent and universal reality that you are able to wangle from the irrelevant accidents of wrinkles and wens, of light and shade, and of the circumstances of the Ohio town.

Themes of such universal import as Sex, Sentiment and Wonder naturally demand to be presented in as universal terms as possible. This universality is achieved by **getting rid of the date line.**

The following suggestions are offered as means of getting rid of the date line and of securing a stronger impression of universality in the presentation of the subject matter:

Some things inevitably bring up suggestions of time and place. AVOID THEM—if you wish your pictures to carry an interest for more than the moment:

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1. Unnecessary realism.
2. Representation of episodes.
3. Action pictures.
4. Accurate period customs.
5. Specific personality.

There are certain devices by which the impression of universality may be heightened. Some of these, as I have noted, are characteristic of the work of great painters.

Raphael frequently utilized the device of **downcast eyes.** He was thus enabled to keep mere personality from becoming too aggressive and insistent.

A common device with El Greco was **elongation** of faces and figures. By this means he escaped from the here and now of realism.

The well-known **stiffness and primness** of Holbein's figures is another method of setting the pictures aside from merely realistic representation.

Among painters of today, we may mention Rockwell Kent as one who effectively escapes from the here and now of literal representation. This he accomplishes by the heroic mold of his characters and by the avoidance of episode.

I am not suggesting these specific methods as necessarily useful to you as a photographer. I mention them to show how artists have recognized and dealt with the problem of eliminating the date line and representing the Subject Matter in universal terms.

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"Is", not "Does"

The best general formula for the elimination of the date line and the realization of the universal qualities of the subject matter is indicated, I believe, in the phrase above.

"IS", NOT "DOES." Try to make your Subject Matter express itself by what it **is**, not by what it **does.** A picture in which your subject matter is very busy **doing** something is almost certain to lose its charm after you have seen it once or twice. Whereas one returns again and again to a picture in which the subject simply sits still or stands still and **is** completely and fully **itself.** Pictures in which the subject does something are apt to fly off on tangents of action and episode and casual accidents of time and place. But pictures in which the subject matter expresses itself solely in terms of **being** draw inward to an ever more unified conception.

Let me illustrate the difference between an "is" picture and a "does" picture in specific terms. There was once an artist who painted a picture of an elderly lady. Evidently a subject of sentimental interest. How should he represent her? He could show her in a bright print dress picking roses in a garden. Or he could show her dressed in her stylish best, descending the stairs. Or he could show her wearing an apron and peeling potatoes in the kitchen.

He could have done any of these things and made a bright, episodic picture, full of momentary interest. But he did not choose to make a "does" picture of it.

Instead, James Abbott McNeill Whistler placed his model, dressed in somber garb of no particular period in profile in front of a nearly plain gray wall, and painted the old lady for all time as "My Mother". This is a thorough-going example of an "is" picture. There is nothing "doing" in the picture; there is neither action nor definite reminder of time and place; everything is concentrated on what the model "is". Everything is repose and quiescence, and thereby becomes the passive mould which each may fill with his own interpretation. As a pre-eminent, universal symbol of motherhood, this is probably the world's favorite sentimental picture.

The Pictures

The formula IS, NOT DOES, has governed the treatment of the subject matter in the pictures that follow. This is a principle that I have held to ever since I began exhibiting in salons. I have always striven to keep out of my pictures any definite hints of time and place, and particularly all suggestions of "smartness" or "up-to-date-ness". None of the pictures, so far as I know, betrays by any detail the date of its origin. For this reason, although they span a period of twelve years, they are, I believe, unusually uniform in spirit and manner.

You and the Picture

Once more let us return to the Formula and refresh our minds about it. Here it is again:

(1) **The picture must, by its mere pattern, make you look at it.**

(2) **Having looked—see!**

(3) **Having seen—enjoy!**

The last couple of chapters have taken us through the first two phases of the formula. We saw that the first problem was to **make people look** at your picture. To do this, you must embody—in its black and white pattern—a command to look. The picture patterns that are most effective in stopping you and making you look at them are those that are most closely related to primitive fear responses. There are four such patterns that, because of this relationship, are particularly able to command your attention: the DIAGONAL, the S-CURVE, the TRIANGLE, the DOMINANT MASS.

When attention is secured, you must reward it with **subject matter of wide emotional appeal.** There are

three themes, we saw, that are specially dependable as sources of subject interest. These are SEX, SENTI-MENT and WONDER. These three themes are most lasting in their appeal if they are presented in such a manner as to eliminate the "date line" of actual time and place.

The Third Phase

This brings us to the third and final phase of the formula:

(3) **Having seen—enjoy.**

In terms of the formula, you have, so far, (1) gotten your public's attention by means of the reflex "shock" (impact) of the picture pattern; (2) rewarded them with interesting Subject Matter. This point is as far as many pictures can bring their public. Such a picture gets their attention; they look and find the subject reasonably interesting—then, without further ado, they pass quickly to the next picture. This is what happens to news pictures and to superficial pictorial works.

But a picture, in order to be completely satisfying, must bring its public one step further. After being commanded to look and after being shown interesting subject matter, then **the looker must be given an opportunity to participate in the picture.**

You and the Picture

This point of **participation** in the picture requires some explanation.
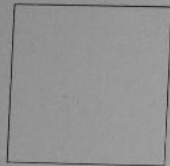
Figure 5
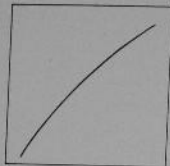
Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

You may protest that you don't participate in a picture, you just look at it. But I ask you to consider more carefully what happens when you look at a picture. After you have oriented yourself and found out what the picture is about, does your mind remain **a passive receptive blank**, upon which the picture imprints itself as on a photographic plate? Surely not. On the contrary, your eye—and therefore your mind—is, when it looks at a picture, never wholly at rest, but moving actively through the picture.

Let me illustrate: Only when looking at a blank piece of paper, such as Figure 5, does your mind remain completely a blank. But let it be given a single diagonal line to play with (Figure 6), and your eye swoops up it. Given a curve (Figure 7), your eye moves along it, caresses the curve at the top, and
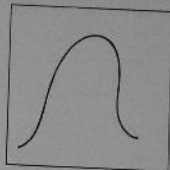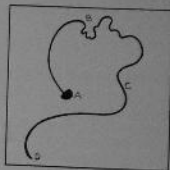
sinks down on the other side. With a more complex contour, such as Figure 8, the eye rises from the impact A, delays over an episode at B, moves deliberately through the curves at C, and finally sinks at D.

By this active motion within the picture, sliding swiftly along some line, retarded a moment by a bit of detail, then racing onward again—noting, comparing, enjoying—the looker **participates** in the picture and makes it part of his **experience.**

This participation in the picture reacts on the Subject Matter, and lifts it to greater importance and interest. By skillfully guiding the looker in his experiencing of the picture, the artist enriches the Subject Matter, confirms and develops it.

Many different sorts of experience are likely to be encountered by the mind as it moves through the pic-

ture. I cannot attempt to talk about them all within the
limits of this chapter; but I will discuss a few of the
more familiar and generally useful types.

Movement and Hindrance

In movement and hindrance we have really two dif-
ferent and opposite sorts of picture experience. But I
discuss them together, because each is a necessary
complement of the other.

In the preceding paragraphs I have given, I believe,
some sort of idea of the experience of **movement** within
the picture. (See Figures 7 and 8.) One point needs
to be stressed, perhaps, lest there be any misunder-
standing about it. When I speak of "movement within
the picture" I have no reference to what is known as
an "action picture"—the depiction of action performed
by the subject. The "movement" I refer to is that of
the eye and mind of the looker, tracing contours, dally-
ing over detail, etc., as I described above. There may
actually be more "movement" of this sort in a picture
of a perfectly passive subject than there is in an action
picture of a pole-vaulter stopped in the middle of his
flight.

Movement is the simplest of the looker's experiences
within the picture, and the most necessary. For it is
through movement that the eye is led to other types
of experience. Without movement, the eye rests, stodgy
and becalmed, somewhere near the center of the pic-
ture, and experiences little else than **ennui.**

Movement takes place most freely and frequently
along **contours** and **outlines.** In order to guide move-
ment, a contour does not need to be continuous or
unbroken. Indeed, as we shall see, the eye enjoys
taking leaps over considerable gaps in the contour. If
the contours are cleverly contrived, they will lead the
eye through a sort of "grand tour" of the picture, turn-
ing it back gently whenever it ventures too near the
edge, and guiding it repeatedly into, through and
around the subject matter. A frequently useful device
in guiding movement within a picture consists of the
folds of drapery or costume.

A more subtle and less insistent type of movement
is that caused by **gradation.** This type is particularly
noticed in a picture in which the device of "dodging
in" has been utilized. In such a case, the darkened
corners subject the eye to gentle pressure, guiding it
back into the picture. Even without contours to guide
it, the eye will move along a plain surface if there is
gradation to lead it on.

There are several things that are apt to impede
seriously or even prevent movement in a picture. One
of these is the presence of "traps"—small, enclosed
light areas such as those that occur between the
crooked elbow and body.* A trap sucks the attention
into it and prevents the eye from moving on.

Another likely source of interference with movement
is the **corners** of the picture itself. Each corner is a

*For further detail on "traps," see the writer's **The Model,** page 58.

sort of "trap", in fact, and exercises the same kind of harmful restraint. Movement, therefore, needs to be carefully sidetracked past the corners; for, once it is drawn into a corner, there is very little chance of extricating it again.

Care should be taken also against running the movement out of the side of the picture. Once the eye is carried clear out of the picture, it finds its way back with the greatest difficulty. If the movement does not encounter the side at too abrupt an angle, however, it may be successfully carried along the edge and presently diverted back into the picture.

This harmful interference with movement that we have just been discussing should not be confused with various types of temporary **hindrance** that lend zest and variety to the looker's experiences within the picture. Movement that is too obvious, too easily accomplished, too cut-and-dried, rapidly becomes boring. So a wise picture-maker incorporates a few hindrances and obstacles on the line of movement. These moments of resistance make the final accomplishment infinitely more pleasant. This resistance, once we have appreciated it, becomes as essential to us (to indulge in gastronomic analogy) as the tang of bitterness in beer and the crispness of celery.

This resistance takes various forms. I mention two of the more familiar ones. One sort of resistance is encountered when the guiding contour thins out to a mere suggestion or momentarily disappears entirely.

This "losing and finding" of the outline is always a pleasing experience. If an actual gap occurs, the eye will gladly take the jump and enjoy doing it—particularly if the direction of departure and the "landing place" are well defined.

Another sort of resistance is that introduced by **complexity** of contour or by bits of **detail.** Moments of complexity and detail force the eye to **slow up** its movements, and thus bring variety into the experience within the picture.*

Movement and resistance should occur in the picture in wise alternation, for each experience gains in pungency by the contrasting presence of the other.

Tactile Qualities

Probably the most primitive of all sense impressions is that of the sense of touch. It is, therefore, particularly charged with profound emotional associations.

Looking at pictures is, of course, basically a **visual** experience. But it is possible to render pictures—particularly photographic pictures—in such a way that surface textures and details arouse distinct **tactile** associations. Owing to the primitive character of the sense of touch, these tactile associations are among the most powerful and profound of the experiences within the picture.

*Particularly good instances of the use of various kinds of resistance and hindrance are found in **Woman of Languedoc**, page 123.

Tactile associations greatly enhance the emotional background of the three subject themes that we considered in the last chapter. Note, among the pictures that follow, how the SEX interest of "Portrait of a Young Girl" is increased by the tactile quality of the **smooth shoulders**; how the impression of **softness** of "Mr. Wu" increases its SENTIMENTAL interest; and how, in "The Heretic", the painful tactile associations of the **nails** enhance the WONDER theme.

These associations of the sense of touch naturally cause the mind to **linger** over them, since touching implies lingering. Tactile qualities are, indeed, a type of hindrance or resistance to movement within the picture. As such they should be limited to small, isolated details or spots, since a picture that is all resistance allows no opportunity for free movement.

Herein lies the reason for the weakness of so-called "Purist" pictures that give a literal and complete all-over rendering of the texture of skin, of a cabbage, or of an old fence post. It is, of course, exceedingly doubtful that such subject matter is ever worthy of representation. But, assuming that it is, the Purist's picture fails to give so true an impression of **the real tactile quality of the texture** as the less literal version that limits full detail to a few climatic "tarrying points". The complete detail in **all** parts of the Purist's version prevents the eye from moving and arriving at an appreciation of the texture in its tactile qualities.

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Confirming Forms

When the mind leaves the contemplation of the mere subject matter and begins to move through the highways and byways of the picture, it runs into numerous subsidiary shapes and configurations of line. As it lingers over these, it gains an **enriched physical experience.** Since it comes to them immediately after leaving its contemplation of the subject matter, it encounters with particular pleasure those shapes that **confirm the implication of the Subject Matter.** By such experiences the Subject Matter itself is enriched and brought nearer to the universal.

Discussion of details from a couple of pictures will make this point clearer.

Note, for example, "Johan the Mad". This is a WONDER theme, dealing with torture and aberration of mind. This torture of mind is clearly shown in the face—where we first look—in the expression of the eyes and the **twisted** mouth. Leaving the face and moving through the picture, we quickly come upon **confirming forms.** The twist of the mouth is confirmed and repeated—in another medium—in the grimly twisted and knotted headdress. Further on in the picture, the sense of aberration is given increased emphasis by the arbitrary diagonal that cuts across the base, and by the erratic placement of the title.

Another use of confirming form is found in "Niccolo Machiavelli". Note, in this picture, the little ribbon that hangs down from the right side of the cap. Make the

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experiment of placing your thumb over this detail and note how the picture is weakened thereby. This ribbon confirms, in its own medium, the impression of evasiveness and slyness that is given by the side-glance of the model. The little quirk at the end of the ribbon does the trick.

Echoes

> "Mary had a little lamb,
> Its fleece was white as snow,
> And everywhere that Mary went
> The lamb was sure to go."

It is not merely the sentiment of this immortal verse that makes it pleasant, but the repetition of familiar sounds. "Snow . . . go"—young and old alike rejoice in the click and jingle of the sounds that so quaintly finds similarity in matters apparently unrelated.

The eye, in its movement through the picture, takes similar pleasure in finding shapes that jingle and rhyme. These **rhymes in form** also serve, like the rhymes in poetry, to tie together parts that are remote from each other.

These repetitions or echoes of form may be regarded as a special case of "confirming forms". In this case we have one form more or less literally confirming another, rather than rendering in another medium the implication of the subject matter.

Investigation will show many instances of echoed form in the pictures that follow. One example is found in "Machiavelli". Note that the motive of the curled tip of the ribbon that we mentioned in the last section is distinctly repeated in the cloud form in the background.

Rhyme or echo of form is a very pleasing effect, but discrimination must be used in employing it. Its use should be isolated and definite. Too many echoes in one picture are merely confusing, monotonous and lacking in point. The effect is precisely that of a hollow room that echoes and re-echoes until the sense and identity of the original sound is lost in the confusion.

SEVEN

Putting the Formula to Work

At the risk of trying your patience, I must once more quote the formula. The formula is the very heart of the book, and it is essential that you have it clearly in mind before we proceed to discuss its application to concrete problems. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I present, for its positively final appearance on this stage, THE FORMULA:

(1) **The picture must, by its mere pattern, make you look at it.**

(2) Having looked—see!

(3) Having seen—enjoy!

The first problem dealt with in this formula for pictorial effectiveness is that of overcoming the initial inertia of the observer and of **making him look at your picture.** The thing in a picture that makes it able to command attention at first glance is, not its subject matter, but its mere black and white **pattern.** This initial crash of the picture pattern that wakes you up and makes you look, we have designated as the

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IMPACT. There are a few picture patterns that are outstanding in their ability to command attention. These are patterns that bear close relationship to **primitive fear responses.** Four of them are particularly qualified in this way: The DIAGONAL, the S-CURVE, the TRIANGLE, the DOMINANT MASS. Pictures based on these patterns have the strongest Impact and are most certain to command your attention.

The second phase of the formula deals with the problem of holding the observer's **interest,** once you have gotten his attention. To do this, you must provide him with **subject matter.** Of course, not all sorts of subject matter are equally interesting. Subject matter is interesting in proportion to the emotional response it creates. We must, therefore, seek subject matter of **wide emotional appeal.** There are three subject themes that, because of their universal emotional background, are especially dependable sources of subject interest: SEX, SENTIMENT, and WONDER. These themes are most lasting in their interest if, in their presentation, they are kept free from crass and realistic implications of time and place.

In the third phase of the formula we considered methods of bringing about the looker's **participation** in the picture. Unless it is to be of merely temporary and topical interest, the looker must find **experience** within the picture that enriches and enhances the subject matter. There are, we saw, numerous **sorts of experience** that give the looker a sense of participation in the

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picture; MOVEMENT and HINDRANCE, both essential and complementary to each other; TACTILE QUALITIES, through which the pungent experience of the sense of touch enhances the emotional suggestion of the Subject Matter; CONFIRMING FORMS, forms that reiterate, in their own abstract medium, the implication of the Subject Matter; ECHOES, repetition, with slight variations, of the same formal motive in various parts of the picture.

You and the Formula

This, then, is the formula; the formula which I originally developed as a means of improving my own work and of gaining a larger audience for it. But, as I have found by experimentation with photographic students of mine, it is capable of wider and more general application. I believe that this formula embodies a method by which **any photographer of fair intelligence and decent technical competence may definitely better his pictures and secure wider recognition for them.**

But merely reading about the formula will not do you any good. You must learn to **apply** it. So in this chapter I offer some general suggestions about using the formula as a basis of self-criticism of your own work.

Obviously, general suggestions are the only kind of suggestions that would be useful. The specific applica-

tion to your own specific problems is up to you. You must put forth your own initiative in applying the formula. Without this initiative, the formula is about as likely to benefit you as the General Law of Relativity or the Third Law of Thermodynamics.

Applying the First Phase

The first phase of the formula, you will remember, deals with the IMPACT—the ability of the picture to get your attention.

Try this experiment with your own pictures. Take a specimen selection of your prints, not less than a dozen. (Or follow the same procedure with proofs that you contemplate making into prints.) Set the prints (or proofs) against the wall upside-down. Or else strew them casually about the floor, wrong-side-up or crosswise, or however they happen to land. Now turn your back on them and after a brief pause look suddenly towards them. The purpose of this strange performance is to enable you to see the pictures freshly and impersonally, not as your own pictures at all. Give the **group as a whole** a glance of not more than two seconds' duration and turn away again.

Now, without looking back, try to recall which pictures, in that single hasty glance, caught and held your eye. Having made your selection mentally, turn around again and set these pictures in a pile by themselves.

These selected pictures are the ones with the best qualities of IMPACT and we will use them further for purposes of analysis. For the moment turn your attention to the discards, the pictures that failed to get your attention. Let us see what is wrong with them. Probably they look like Figure 9. Or possibly they resemble Figure 10.

Pictures that lack IMPACT are probably marked by one of the three following characteristics:

1. Scattered or speckled blacks and whites. There is no dominating pattern. This is the special fault of Figure 9. This is a frequent failing in landscapes.

2. General lack of contrast. The picture, in other words, is grey all over. Pattern, if it is there, is not conspicuous enough. This is the fault demonstrated in Figure 10.

3. More specifically, the complete absence of any of the four basic picture patterns: DIAGONAL S-CURVE, TRIANGLES, or DOMINANT MASS.

Of the four basic patterns, DOMINANT MASS is undoubtedly of the most frequent occurrence. Often, among pictures that are lacking in IMPACT, one may detect traces of incipient Dominant Mass—that is, of would-be Dominant Mass that for some reason fails to dominate.

Failures of Dominant Mass may be due to various causes. Here are some of them:
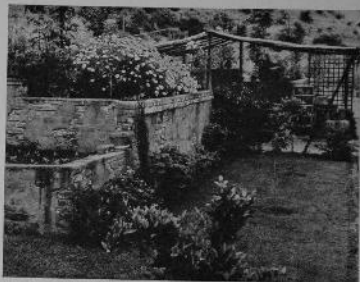
Figure 9: Scattered blacks and whites. No basic picture pattern.

1. Lack of **size**. In order to dominate, a figure must seem formidable and impressive. A small figure in a large area of picture dominates with difficulty.

2. Lack of **unity**. Instead of a single mass, there may be several unrelated and unconnected masses.

3. Lack of **cohesion**. A mass will not dominate if it spreads about instead of being concentrated.

4. Lack of **stability**. Form loses its ability to dominate if it does not appear firmly planted and stable. Forms that dominate are usually broader at the base than at the top.

5. Lack of **isolation**. Forms are strongest when they stand alone. The isolation of the central form may be damaged by subsidiary forms that crowd in upon it from the sides or by over-insistent backgrounds.

The method of eliminating these faults is, I believe, largely self-evident—i.e., conscientious endeavor to keep them out of your pictures. There are at least five different stages in the making of a photograph when you have opportunity to eliminate these and similar faults, and to ensure your picture having the best possible qualities of IMPACT. These are the five stages:

1. Preliminary planning. A picture that is thought out in advance and possibly planned in a thumb-nail sketch can avoid many of the faults that weaken the IMPACT of a casual, unplanned potshot.

2. During shooting. In this stage the essentials of the picture are set and established, so when you look at the potential picture on the ground-glass or

Figure 18. Basic picture pattern of DOMINANT MASS greatly weakened by general lack of contrast.

in the finder of your camera, make sure that it contains elements of IMPACT.*

3. Selection of Proofs. In weeding out the proofs, opportunity is given both to eliminate those that are hopelessly deficient in IMPACT and to pick out those in which the IMPACT may be strengthened by subsequent operations.

4. During projection printing. Various types of control applied during projection—local printing, dodging, vignetting, elongation, etc.—offer opportunity for enhancing or altering the quality of IMPACT.**

5. Control processes. Such processes as the Paper Negative and Bromoil Transfer allow of much control in dealing with factors of the IMPACT.

Applying the Second Phase

In this roundabout manner we return to the experiment that we started a couple of pages back with a dozen of your prints. We were left with two piles of pictures: one group of pictures being distinguished by positive qualities of IMPACT; the other group lacking in IMPACT, save as it may be enhanced in one or two cases by the use of Projection Control or other control processes.

*I have elsewhere dealt with two important phases of this stage of picture-making; i. e., in **Pictorial Lighting** (1935) and **The Model** (1937).

I have described some of these methods in my volume on **New Projection Control (1942).

Let us now continue with the group that you selected as having immediately arresting qualities of pattern.

Set them up in a row, right side up this time, and look them over carefully. The next problem, in terms of the formula, is that of Subject Matter and its presentation. Consider the subject matter of each picture. Decide **candidly,** unswayed by any personal element, whether the subject matter in each case is really of **general emotional appeal.** Note in particular whether any of them fit into the categories of SEX, SENTIMENT, or WONDER. No matter how excellent the qualities of IMPACT, relentlessly throw out everything in which the subject matter is lacking in general emotional appeal.

This will leave you—I hope—with a detectable remainder. Subject this remainder to another scrutiny. Look this time for bald and realistic notes in the subject matter that set a definite "date line" on the picture. If the "date line" is present in obvious literal reminders of time and place in costume or background—throw the picture out.

If you have any pictures left at this point, you are now ready to undertake the third phase of the formula.

Applying the Third Phase

The third phase is concerned, as you will remember, with the various devices that heighten the looker's sense of **experience** in the picture.

So now examine your remaining pictures (if any) with these things in view. You are not any longer concerned with literal subject matter, so you may be able to get a fresher impression of the pictures by looking at them in various unaccustomed ways—upside down, crosswise, close at hand, far away. Pay attention, not to subject matter, but to lines, contours, patterns and abstract shapes.

The most essential of experiences within the picture are those of **movement** and **hindrance.** Every picture should provide both. Therefore, look to see whether your pictures contain these necessary elements. Is the eye led through and around the picture by a fairly continuous contour? Does this contour hold the eye within the picture and guard it against falling into the corners? On the other hand, is the contour made interesting and varied by moments of resistance and hindrance? Is the contour kept from being too smug and easy by bits of complexity or detail that cause the eye to tarry a moment?

Discard the pictures that fail to pass this test. Any picture that passes this test, having survived the preceding ordeal, is probably a very good one.

Confirming forms and **echoes** are not such absolute necessities, but their presence will definitely strengthen any picture and increase its effectiveness. If you find them well used in your picture, you may give it a still higher mark.

The five stages of control that I mentioned earlier in

this chapter are all useful in applying the third phase of the formula to your work.

1. In the stage of preliminary planning, the main contours may be mapped out and provision made for the use of confirming forms.

2. During shooting, as I have said, the essentials of the picture are permanently established. At this stage, the principal elements of movement and hindrance must be settled. Note in particular the arrangement of drapery and the placement of detail, for these things are important in guiding movement and creating hindrance.

3. The selection of proofs offers opportunity for censorship. Proofs in which movement is lacking or confused, or is too smug, should be discarded—unless later stages of control provide means of salvaging them.

4. By "local printing" during projection of the negative considerable control may be exercised over the quality of the contour. Weak contours may be strengthened, and contours that are too smug or mechanical may be made more interesting by means of "losing and finding".

5. Paper Negative, Bromoil Transfer, and similar processes also provide much opportunity for adjustment of contours and emphasis of elements of Confirming Form.

Using the Formula

Don't be surprised or dismayed if, at first, none of your pictures come through this searching examination. The test is a very stringent one, if you have applied it honestly and sincerely; and a picture which survives it must have very definite elements of excellence.

The formula, if it is to benefit you, **must be used, and used constantly.** Put all your pictures through the ordeal. Every time that you look over a bunch of your proofs—put the formula to work.

Throw pictures away recklessly. Every photographer saves too many pictures. Without compunction, tear up your proofs and decimate your prints. And having gotten rid of them—forget them. Remember that every inferior picture that you discard raises the average excellence of those that remain.

EIGHT

Preface to the Pictures

Pictures, if they are good pictures, should stand on their own merits, without benefit of comment.

So it is not with the idea of bolstering them up, but simply to show the formula under actual working conditions, that I include a few remarks on each of the pictures that follow. I believe that the general application of the formula to the pictures will be so simple and obvious to you, once you have gotten the hang of it, as to require little explanation. So only in the first few pictures do I give detailed analysis in terms of the formula. Thereafter I limit my comment on each to some particular phase or problem of pictorial effect that the picture especially illustrates.

The Pictures

Mr. Wu

The Impact is created by DOMINANT MASS of a large and imposing sort. Obviously, SENTIMENT is the basis of the subject interest.

This picture furnishes a good instance of the importance of the factor of **recognition** in the appreciation of subject matter. A great deal of the pleasure in the picture lies in the humorous contrast between the ferociously bristling DOMINANT MASS and the very small bit of dog flesh it is found to represent.

MR. WU
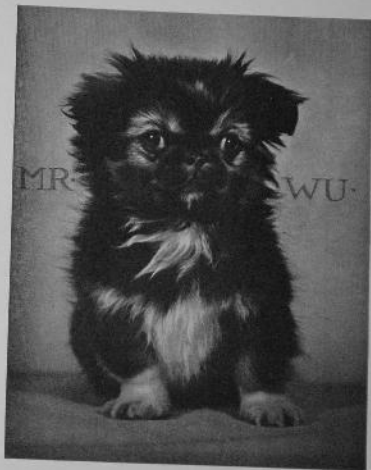
Girl of Smyrna

The DOMINANT MASS in this picture (as in "Youth") is strongly supported by the S-CURVE pattern. Here is the SEX theme, with a considerable tincture of the Romantic theme of WONDER (the lure of far places).

Contrasting with the soft swing of the skirt and body is the abrupt zig-zag pattern of the darker elements. Note that these darker and weightier elements (hair, sash, lute and scarf) are evenly distributed on the two sides of the picture.

My Aunt

DOMINANT MASS is the basis of the Impact, which is here enhanced by the isolation of the figure and the strong notes of **contrast.**

The piquant expression and the humorously sentimental theme receive amusing CONFIRMATION in the little explosion of decoration at the top of the hat. The bits of detail at the shoulders provide moments of HINDRANCE and break the otherwise too snug pyramidal contour. Note how the little loops of lace are ECHOED on the hat and at the back of the neck.

The Anatomy Student

DOMINANT MASS of a broad and stable pyramidal type. SEX and SENTIMENT both contribute to the subject interest.

MOVEMENT is interesting and varied. The eye moves swiftly up the outstretched arm of the woman, tarries a moment over the complexer details of the man's right hand, travels more deliberately along his right arm to his face, from which the intensity of his glance throws the eye to the face of the woman. Going back to the student's face, the eye is carried along the curve of the left arm to the hand, where the direction of the gesture once more forces attention to the woman's face. TACTILE QUALITIES considerably add to the eye's experience, particularly in the contrast between the smooth flesh and the rough texture of the coat.
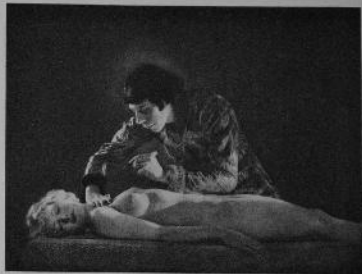
Paganini

Here is DOMINANT MASS that, in spite of its erratic contour, is firm and compact. To this are added elements of the S-CURVE.

The erratic contour is in keeping with the sense of melodrama and the temperamental morbidity that are associated with the name of Paganini. This angular contour is developed throughout the picture. Note the active zig-zag that brings the eye, by a series of jerks, up the bow, up the fiddle, up the broken strings, into the face. Note the brilliant whites that explode near the center—the eyes, the two points of the collar, the handkerchief, the series of lights on each knuckle. The motive of the curled broken strings is RE-ECHOED in the disorderly wisps of hair. Note how the melodrama is increased by the extreme amount of dodging.

NICOLO
PAGANINI

GENOA
18'27

Moonlight Madonna

The Impact here is based upon DOMINANT MASS.
Note the stability and compactness of the central shape,
and how the rock and jug both contribute to the pyra-
midal shape.

The universal quality of the subject interest (SENTI-
MENT and WONDER) is enhanced by the passive pos-
ture and the downcast eyes. This is definitely an "is"
picture rather than a "does" picture. (See Chapter
Five.) Note that the Impact in this picture gains its end
by the simple power of its central form rather than by
elements of contrast which would have been at variance
with the quiet emotion of the subject.

Parapluie

The Impact is furnished by the large bat-like DOMINANT MASS of the umbrella. The theme here is SEX, seasoned with humor after the French formula. Despite the very literal appurtenances (the umbrella), the extreme simplification inclines the treatment toward the universal.

The dignified, geometrical black mass of the umbrella is given a raffish, whimsical touch by the tiny dangling strap. Cover this up, and note how important it is to the picture.

Meteorological note: The rain was supplied by the simple expedient of dragging a piece of fine sandpaper lightly across the surface of the negative.

Girl of the Highlands

DOMINANT MASS with wide pyramidal base is here the source of the impact. The theme is a SENTIMENTAL one, primarily, but there is also an element of SEX.

The eye MOVES swiftly up the smooth flesh of the straight legs, encounters HINDRANCES in the arrangement of the drapery about the waist, and moves on again to the face along the simpler lines of the blouse. The mountain valley is ECHOED in the neckline, and the firmly planted foot finds CONFIRMATION in the right angle of the elbow.

The Moving Finger

Here is Impact based on a group of triangles. A light triangle with its point toward you, and a dark triangle with its point away from you—these are the major elements. In addition there are many other lesser triangles interlocked with one another. There is a dark triangle in the left-hand corner and a lighter one in the right-hand corner. The lace is triangular; so also are the hand, the sleeve and the headdress.

Girl with Corset

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS combined with a suggestion of S-CURVE. The theme of the subject interest is SEX, to which SENTIMENT is added by the frankness and ingenuousness of the expression.

The eye MOVES swiftly through the smooth passages of flesh and finds HINDRANCES in the detail of the corset. Further hindrances are provided in the TACTILE SUGGESTIONS of contrasting textures—flesh contrasted with corset, and flesh contrasted with hair.

Pistachio Girl

The S-CURVE is an important factor in the impact of this picture. Stable and firmly based DOMINANT MASS is here also.

The freedom and vitality of the subject are realized in the MOVEMENT of the eye, which is led through swinging curves and figure eights. The eye follows up the right leg, is swept clear across the body by the curve of the apron, leaps across to the left hand, swings swiftly up the left arm, dallies a moment over the face, circles the head and descends the right arm. From the right hand it jumps to the curved fold in the front of the apron which turns it upward to the basket. It circumnavigates the basket until the left hand swings it downward again to the curve of the apron, whence it arrives, exhilarated and slightly dizzy, at its starting point.

Black Magic

Here is DOMINANT MASS strengthened by the menace of TRIANGULAR SHAPES. In the harsh contrast and the spread legs there is a suggestion in the impact of something clawlike and spiderish.

This is a WONDER theme—the menace and fascination of the unknown.

The MOVEMENT is in keeping with the character of the theme. The eye is jerked by a series of abrupt zig-zags up to the startling and ferocious climax of the face. Note how the long dangling drape is ECHOED by the tiny tendril that hangs from the left shoulder, and is further repeated in inverted fashion by the upstanding wisp of hair.

Whirlwind

This is a firm, compact DOMINANT MASS, with a suggestion of the DIAGONAL.

The tightness of the lower part of the mass throws greater emphasis on the free contour of the hair and the exaltation of the expression. The swirl of the hair is a sort of CONFIRMING FORM to the sense of release and wild freedom of which the face tells. The same thought is RE-ECHOED in the cloud shapes in the background.

Taj

The Impact is based on DOMINANT MASS of an extremely cohesive type. Note the absence of loose ends; everything is closely knit and bound together.

This cohesive quality makes MOVEMENT within the picture particularly swift and easy. The principal elements of HINDRANCE are those afforded by the full detailed rendering of the scarf and jar.
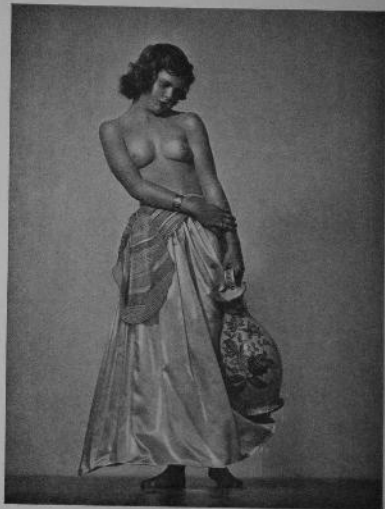
The Glory of War

Less than any of the other pictures in this collection does this print express a COMMAND TO LOOK. The IMPACT is decidedly faulty, owing to scattered blacks and whites and the absence of any clearly defined pattern. But, like a good press photograph, it is able to hold interest, if seen, by its shocking subject matter. And the scattered blacks and whites, which so vitiate the Impact, are found to be curiously expressive of war's wanton destruction of normal, solid facts and virtues.

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Youth

Here is DOMINANT MASS, with the S-CURVE as an important supporting pattern.

The latter pattern—the Line of Beauty of Hogarth—is particularly adapted to the theme of the SENTIMENTAL glorification of serene and poised Youth. Despite the use of the nude, Sentiment is probably a stronger element of subject interest in this picture than SEX.

The Warlock

Here are DIAGONAL and DOMINANT MASS, made more powerfully arresting by the strong **contrast.** This is a WONDER theme, of course—the Supernatural—the world of demons and witches.

The impression of speed is built up by the many converging thrusts along the diagonal—the broomstick, the forearm, the cords in the neck, the flapping drapery.

The Tantric Sorcerer

The impact is based on a powerful DOMINANT MASS, made additionally strong by the suggested DIAGONALS. There is here something of the arresting quality of a match kindled in the dark.

Clearly, this is an example of the WONDER theme in subject material. The emotional quality of the theme is enhanced by the sinister suggestion of the lighting.

The MOVEMENT in this picture swings the eye in a sort of spiral—up the hand, diverted by the crooked forefinger along the top of the headdress, thence down into the face. The eye leaves the picture by the jagged line of the shoulder, and is caught and tossed again into the picture space. There is interesting HINDRANCE in the involved detail of the scepter and the complex contour of the headdress. Note how the motive of the curved forefinger is ECHOED in the decoration of the scepter, in the drooping mustaches and in the highlights on the brow.

The Heretic

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS, which is made additionally powerful by the strong contrast between body and background.

The theme, owing to its relationship to the dark machinations of witchcraft, may be classed as WONDER, which is here considerably tinged with SEX interest.

The darkness of the surrounding areas insistently returns the movement of the eye to the central figure. The hindrances to this movement are sharp and definite, the smooth contours of the limbs being repeatedly hacked across by the intersecting lines of the bonds. There is a strong TACTILE QUALITY in the way that the bonds bite into the flesh. Note that the points where the tactile suggestion is most painful—i.e., the nails through the ankles—are prevented from becoming too dominant and literally revolting by being placed in deep shadow.
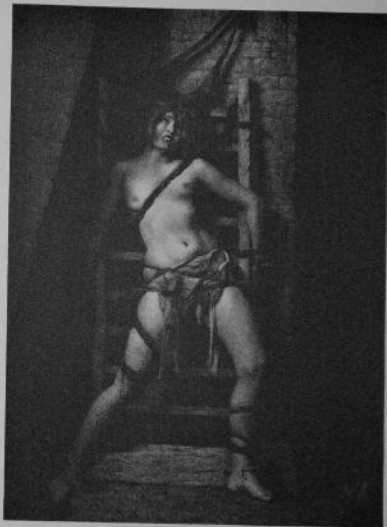
Cesare Borgia

DOMINANT MASS supported by a DIAGONAL is the basis of impact in this picture.

The important and characteristic element of the wry curve of the smile finds CONFIRMING FORMS in the shape of the high-lights in the hair, in the curl on the left side of the face, and in the shadowed fold in the shirt front.

Evening

DOMINANT MASS of a simple pyramidal type. The theme is SENTIMENT.

Here all the forms CONFIRM the impression of the weight and weariness of the years—the drooping mouth, the heavy eyelids, the flaccid, dangling wisps of hair.

116

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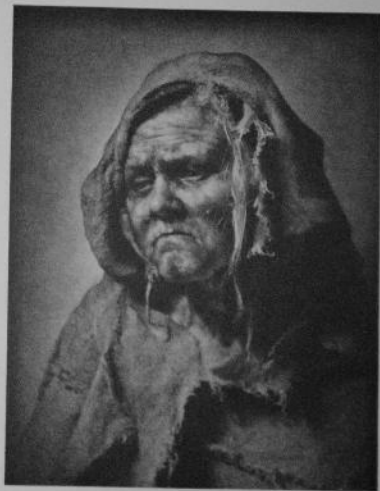
Fragment

SEX is not so much the subject interest here as the SENTIMENT evoked by brave and gallant remnants of the past. The transformation of a living body into an apparent fragment of statuary helps to bring it nearer to a universal symbol. By this drastic mutilation, all realistic suggestions of time, place and personality are wiped out, and nothing remains except the eternal mystery of the female body.

The MOVEMENT of eye within this picture is particularly swift and incisive. There is no hint of a single vacillating or doubtful thought. The line on the right side of the torso swings the eye up with a powerful crescendo to the apex of the broken arm. From here it moves more deliberately down the body. Additional elements of hindrance are provided in the TACTILE suggestions of the scars and nicks in the marble.
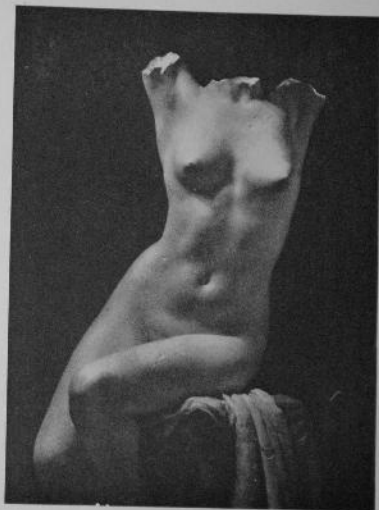
Woman of Languedoc

We have here DOMINANT MASS with a definite hint of the S-CURVE in the swing of the body. SEX is the theme—not so much in a specific sense as in terms of universal fecundity—rich soil topped by the eternal woman.

Note the variety of the HINDRANCES—the **detail** of the basket, the **complexity** in the folds of the apron. There is a prevalence of small triangular motives which create a sparkling scintillant effect.

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Torse

Here is impact based on DOMINANT MASS with some suggestion of the DIAGONAL. The theme of the subject interest is principally SEX.

Increased HINDRANCE is given by the undulations of the plastic lighting which also increases the TACTILE qualities. Further tactile effects are achieved by the small area of literal detail in the veins of the hand and in the contrast between the texture of the hair and the shoulder. Note the manner in which the shape of the breasts is RE-ECHOED by the shoulders and the up-thrust chin.
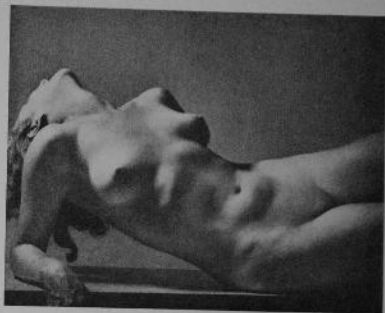
Portrait of a Young Girl

DOMINANT MASS with a suggestion of the DIAGONAL. The theme is more SENTIMENT than sex.

There is a TACTILE QUALITY of extreme softness of hair and flesh. This serves as a CONFIRMING element to the quiet, contemplative expression.

Death of Hypatia

The DIAGONAL of the Impact is made increasingly arresting by the violence of the contrast.

The shocking nature of this contrast is in keeping with the melodramatic turn taken here by the WONDER and SEX themes. Note that the quality of **contemplative passivity** lifts the picture above the merely episodic, and makes this moment much more menacing than it would have been had the figures been actively engaged in fighting and clawing at each other.

The motive of the crooked arm of the cowled figure is RE-ECHOED in the curve of calf, thigh, breast and arm of the woman.
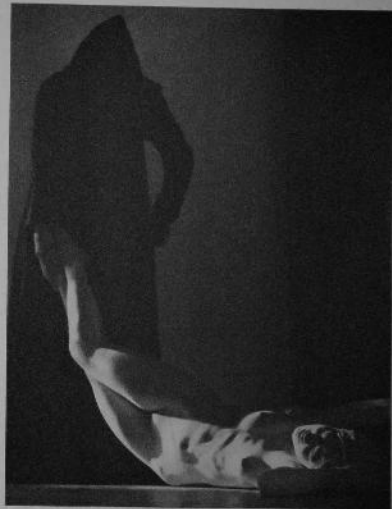
Thunder

A compact DOMINANT MASS with strong notes of contrast is here the basis of the Impact. The theme of WONDER is carried out in the expression of the face and in the swirling cloud masses.

These clouds CONFIRM the energy expressed by the hair. The same theme is expressed in the sweeping curve of the neckline. Note the element of HINDRANCE in the detail of drapery on the shoulder. The eye tarries over this for a moment and is then carried swiftly down the descending curve, up into the face and thence into the surrounding sky.

Rope Dancer

Here is an impact based on a DIAGONAL supported by various TRIANGLES. The subject theme is SEX, to which is added a suggestion of the WONDER theme (the eternal mystery and fascination of the circus.) The theme is freed of realistic implications by being treated solely for its decorative values.

The converging lines of the legs MOVE the eye swiftly into the picture. After meeting and overcoming numerous HINDRANCES, the eye is swung back into the picture space by the black mass of hair. Note the tiny accent of TACTILE QUALITY which is provided by the little depression in the flesh of the leg where the rib of the parasol touches it.
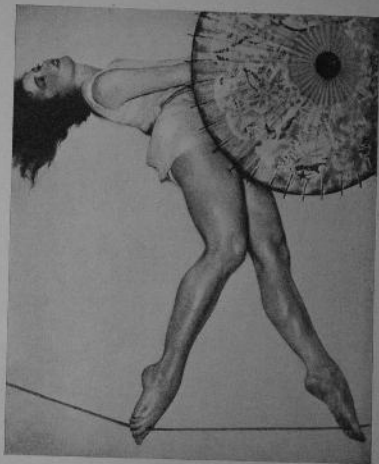
Preparation for the Sabbot

Here is Impact based on DOMINANT MASS, made explosive and startling by violent contrast—a gleaming white figure set against a gloomy background, like a flame flaring in the darkness. There are also elements of the S-CURVE. SEX and WONDER both contribute to the subject interest.

The looker is given a sense of the young witch's impending flight by repeated thrusts along the diagonal running from lower left to upper right. This direction is emphasized by the witch's lifted leg, by the broomstick, by the arm of the old beldame and by the right arm of the witch.

The Vampire

The Impact is here created by the DIAGONAL which is made additionally arresting by the strong **contrast.** This is an example of the WONDER theme—the strange and terrible legend of the Undead.

Note how the wedge shape of the stake is ECHOED in the triangular folds of the grave clothes that swathe the body. There is a violent TACTILE QUALITY in the penetration of the stake into the body. This is also felt, in a lesser degree, in the contrast between the smooth flesh of the shoulder and the rough stone.

Flemish Maid

DOMINANT MASS with strong contrast provides the impact. The subject interest is founded on SENTIMENT (the charm of familiar, domestic things).

MOVEMENT around the involved contour enclosed by the arms, shoulders and headdress holds the eye within the picture. Owing to the placid, familiar implications of the theme, the movement is made slow and deliberate with many HINDRANCES and tarrying places introduced by complex bits of detail and contour.

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Portrait of an American

Here is compact DOMINANT MASS with strong elements of contrast. The elongation serves to wipe out distracting realistic details and to make this a generalized, universal portrait rather than a personalized one. The decisiveness and directness of this portrait are due to the insistent vertical elements.

Ethnological note: The extreme and effective length of this head was attained by emphasizing, through projection printing, characteristics already inherent in the model.
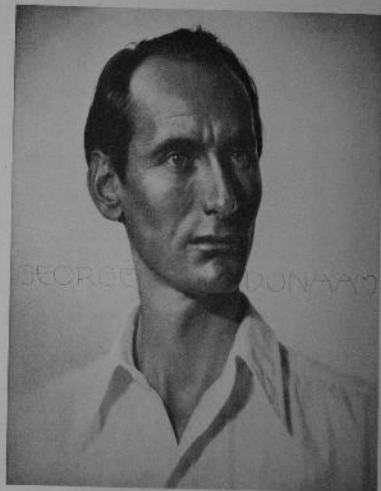
Stamboul

Compact DOMINANT MASS is evident here, together with a hint of the S-CURVE. SEX is the obvious source of subject interest, but there is also something of the WONDER theme—the romance of far countries.

The outer contour is smooth, but ample HINDRANCES are provided in the complexity of detail at shoulder and girdle. Note how the three fingers of the right hand ECHO the three daggers.

Human Relations

Impact is based on DOMINANT MASS supported by a powerful DIAGONAL.

The disordered hair is really a sort of CONFIRMING FORM which develops, in its own medium, the savagery of the action. Cover the hair with your finger, and imagine how greatly the picture would lose if the hair were slicked down smoothly. The bracelet on the arm, by introducing a note of HINDRANCE, adds strength to the gesture. Note how it is weakened when this element is covered up.

HUMAN·RELATIONS·1932
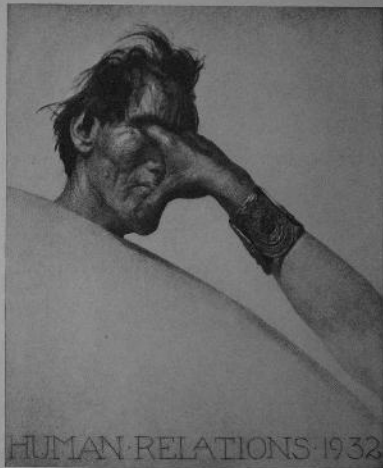
Fagin

The DOMINANT MASS of the Impact is strengthened by numerous TRIANGLES. The triangles serve to strengthen the glint of **menace** contained in the eyes.

Here is a crafty, secretive character. So there are no passages of easy and free MOVEMENT. Instead, the movement is cramped by continual HINDRANCES that twist and turn the eye through bits of involved detail. Note the ECHOING of the motive in the twisted smile in the lock of hair by the right eye, and in the pattern of the headdress.

Belphegor

The DOMINANT MASS of the Impact is made more forceful and startling by the strong contrast. Here is a WONDER theme — the dark fascination of the sub-human.

The contour is very simple, but ample HINDRANCES are afforded by the lumpy modelling and by the TAC-TILE QUALITIES. These tactile suggestions are all of a harsh sort and help to build up the bestiality of the theme; e.g., the stiff, bristly hair and the bulbous fungoid mass on the temple. Note the REPETITION of a bulging crescent-shaped motive — the brows, the wings of the nose, the cheek bones and chin.
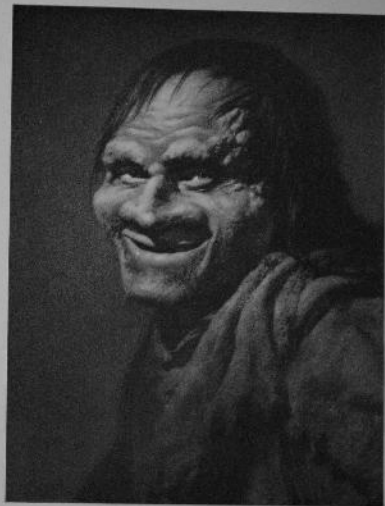
Johan the Mad

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS which gains in force by its **size** and extreme **cohesiveness.**

This picture (as we have already seen in Chapter SIX) offers a particularly good instance of the use of CONFIRMING FORMS. The madness and agony that appears in the staring eyes and the twisted mouth is CONFIRMED in another medium in the tightly twisted headdress. The theme of madness is further ECHOED and developed (1) in the diagonal that hacks off the bottom of the picture, and (2) in the erratic arrangement of the title.

Frou Frou

DOMINANT MASS is here supported by a DIAGONAL. The theme is frankly SEX, but is presented lightly and delicately.

The contrasting elements of lace increase the TACTILE QUALITIES of the adjoining area of flesh. Note how the fussy little bow serves as a CONFIRMING FORM to the piquant expression. The expression loses some of its sparkle when the bow is covered up.

Circe

Here we have a simple pyramidal DOMINANT MASS with strong notes of contrast.

Two themes contribute to the subject matter; SEX and WONDER. Note how an increased impression of impersonality and universality is gained by the use of elongation.

There is a motive of a curiously pointed curve which is repeatedly ECHOED throughout the picture. It appears in the line of the jaw, in the curve of the breasts, in the lift of the eyebrows, in the tiara, in the hairline and in the contour of the top of the head. The prevalence of this elusive ovoid motive emphasizes the suggestion of intangibility and unreality.

Niccolo Machiavelli

DOMINANT MASS is here the basis of the impact. There is definitely a suggestion of something crouching and beastlike in the hint of pointed **ears** on either side of the headdress. There is also an implication of the S-CURVE in the line of the headdress and the sweep of the sleeve.

The whole expressiveness of the picture lies in the suggestion of evasiveness and craftiness in the side-long glance and the one-sided smile. The twist of this smile is CONFIRMED in the dangling ribbon and RE-ECHOED in the cloud form in the upper corner. The same sardonic motive smirks at you repeatedly in the curve of the collar, in the veins of the hand, and in the twisted folds of the sleeve.
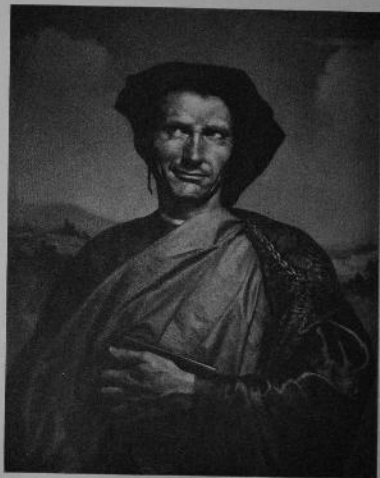
Doris

DOMINANT MASS, given stability by the spreading base, and compactness by joining the dark of the hair to the dark of the dress.

The theme is SENTIMENT, which is given an added piquancy of SEX by the challenging glance.

The flower is in effect a CONFIRMING FORM which emphasizes the delicacy of the subject material. The flower also RE-ECHOES the lacy bits of detail at wrist and throat.

1928

DORIS

The New Race

DOMINANT MASS is noted here, the strength of which is increased by the darkness of the sky and landscape background.

SEX is the theme, touched with WONDER at the mystery of fecundity. Resistance to the eye's movement through the picture is afforded by the roughly hewn angles. Note the almost geometrical regularity of the area enclosed by the arms, hands and shoulders. This angular quality, although unfeminine, increases the impression of massive and primitive strength. The heavy breasts find CONFIRMING FORMS in the rolling hills beyond. The folds of the dress are ECHOED in the ravines and defiles in the background, the same motive being again repeated in the sweeping curves of the hair,

Piety

The Impact is created in this picture by the powerful DIAGONAL.

Hands are often more truly revealing of character and emotion than are faces. Hands, therefore, may on occasion be legitimate objects of emotional interest. The interest here is clearly based on SENTIMENT.

Because of their own complexity of structure, the hands are here presented without extraneous detail. The moments of RESISTANCE are provided by the hands themselves—the slight projection of the thumbs, the rippling contour past the tips of the fingers, the bit of literal skin texture near the wrist. Note that the moments of resistance are slight and in no way contradict the quiet implications of the theme of Piety.

L'Amour

A strongly contrasted DOMINANT MASS is the basis of the impact. To this is added a powerful suggestion of the DIAGONAL.

SEX is of course the subject interest, which is here given additional morbid pungency by the sadistic implications of the theme.

The MOVEMENT is rough and jagged, but is held closely within the picture. TACTILE QUALITIES are very evident here, and are derived from the contrast between the shaggy coat of the beast and the smooth skin of the girl.

Zoological note: This is not a montage or combination print. The two figures were actually photographed together. The only added elements are the clouds, which were put in by Bromoil.

Betty

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS, which is made more compact and cohesive by the device of raising the shoulder. The subject interest grows out of SEX shading into SENTIMENT.

The otherwise slick contour provides its element of RESISTANCE and pleasant hesitation in the detail and complexity of the comb. Note how the shape of the comb CONFIRMS the roundness of the shoulder. Note also that the detail of the comb is delicately RE-ECHOED in the tiny curls on either side of the head.

BETTY

Pas de Ballet

DOMINANT MASS is here made startling and poster-like by **contrast** and **isolation.** The subject is given a universal implication by the complete elimination of all non-essentials and by the absence of realistic muscular strain.

The eye MOVES up the rhythmic contour of the legs, is caught, held and turned back into the picture by the filmy skirt. The skirt also serves to introduce a TAC-TILE element—emphasizing, by contrast, the gleaming smoothness of the flesh.
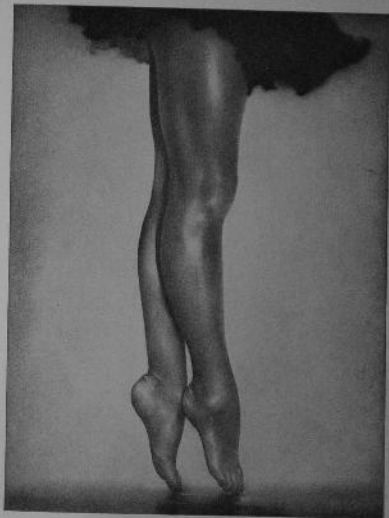
A La Gare

This is DOMINANT MASS of the simplest pyramidal type. The subject interest, of course, is direct and out-right SENTIMENT. The harsh DIAGONAL acts as an effective foil to the softness of the face. The tightly drawn shawl and headdress, by their meagerness, serve as CONFIRMING FORMS that emphasize the pathos of the expression. The straight pyramidal contour would prove too dull and uneventful to sustain the eye's interest, so HINDRANCES are provided in the rather full rendition of the pattern and folds of the shawl.

The Priestess

Here is a firmly planted DOMINANT MASS combined with the S-CURVE. Despite the use of the nude, the theme (as I have previously pointed out) is that of WONDER—the cruel, absolute, inscrutable mystery of the **Law.** The implications of the theme are borne out by the ponderous pyramidal form of the Impact.
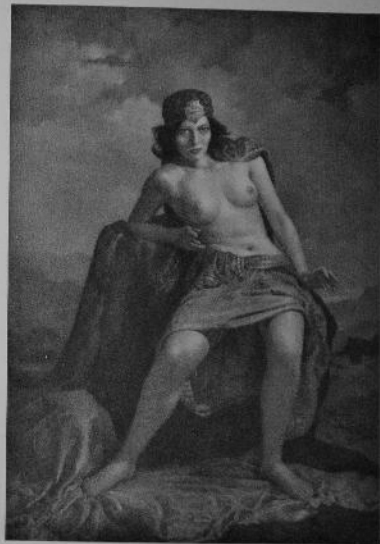
The Epicure

Here is DOMINANT MASS with a hint of the DIAGONAL.

The zestful grin sparkles throughout the picture in individual separated high-light accents. The same thought is developed in the whimsical contour of the front of the garment.
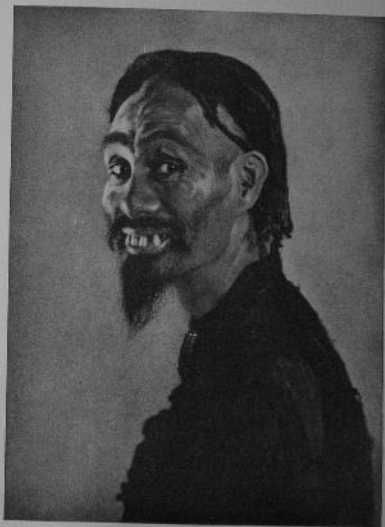
Give Us This Day

Three figures are here joined into a single, pyramidally shaped DOMINANT MASS. TRIANGLES also contribute to the impact.

SENTIMENT (the "humble life" theme) touched with WONDER is the basis of the subject interest.

The form of the oar blade is ECHOED in the shape of the man's collar. Note the rhythmic conformity of the number of physical elements in the picture: **three** figures, **three** apples; **one** oar, **one** jug.
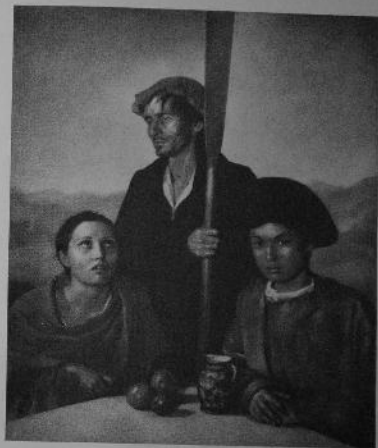
Lazarus

We have here DOMINANT MASS and the S-CURVE made emphatic by contrast. The theme, of course, is WONDER—the mystery of death and man's victory over it. It is a subject universal in import, and is presented with as little in the way of physical appurtenances as possible. Two elements alone carry the theme —the mortal symbol of the skull and Lazarus' gesture toward the light.

Desert-Born

Here is a DOMINANT MASS of a somewhat pyra-midal character. The staff brings in suggestions of the S-CURVE. The subject interest is based on SENTIMENT —the simple life theme—primitive existence close to the soil.

The primitive thought is CONFIRMED in the broad-based, firmly planted figure and in the harsh intersec-tion of lights and shadows. The cloud mass is ECHOED in size and shape by the shadow underneath the figure.

The Possessed

This picture offers a particularly good study in the use of confirming forms and echoes.

The WONDER theme of the terror that howls in barren places is expressed in the wind that sweeps through this picture. Before it everything writhes and dissolves; Nature disintegrates into nightmare.

Note the repetition of the twisted spikey theme—the tree forms on the distant hill, the tufts of hair, the claw-like fingers, the tattered garment. We feel the force of the wind as actual resistance to the movement of the eye through the picture. The eye tries to move along the contour of the arm, but is repeatedly caught and carried over to the left of the picture.

Napoleon

Towering DOMINANT MASS, broad-based and stable, is made more cohesive and unified by the use of the long coat.

The rolling masses of clouds serve as CONFIRMING FORMS to the lowered brow.

Personality note: The Little Corporal was interpreted for this picture by the eminent character actor, Peter Lorre.
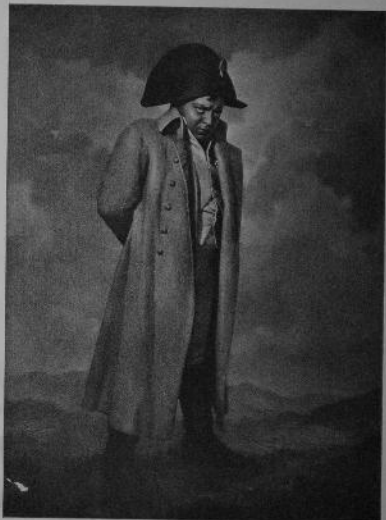
Tranquility

Here is a DIAGONAL with a single strong note of **contrast.** The subject theme is obviously SENTIMENT.

Note the many CONFIRMING FORMS of the atmosphere of quiet and nocturnal revery. All shapes seem affected by the lassitude and langour of the summer night. The moon hangs low, as if unable to struggle higher in the heavens. The two figures bend their heads dreamily, the branches bend low, even the neck of the jug bends in response.
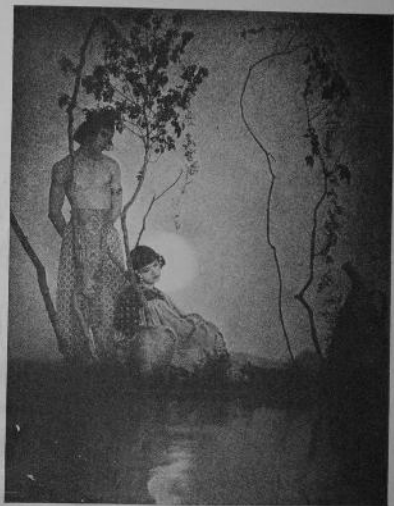
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